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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIFR](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: TIBET: CHINA RAMPS UP PROPAGANDA IN ADVANCE OF
MARCH ANNIVERSARIES

REF: A. OSC CPP20090302710005
[1](#)B. OSC CPP20090302172001
[1](#)C. BEIJING 483
[1](#)D. BEIJING 419
[1](#)E. CHENGDU 41
[1](#)F. CHENGDU 34
[1](#)G. NEW DELHI 369

Classified By: Political Internal Unit Chief
Dan Kritenbrink. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) In advance of the 50th anniversary of the March 10, 1959 Tibetan uprising, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is engaged in a propaganda campaign focused on "positive" aspects of its rule over Tibet, particularly its "emancipation" of serfs, as a device for diverting media attention away from the Dalai Lama during this sensitive period. This propaganda effort has included the release of a March 2 "White Paper" on "Fifty Years of Democratic Reform in Tibet," and the CCP Propaganda Department has reportedly directed media outlets to write positive reports on the new "Serf Emancipation Day" holiday. The Xinhua News Agency even fabricated quotes from a Western journalist supposedly supporting Chinese policies in Tibet, following the journalist's participation in an official tour of the TAR in February focused on the new "Serf Emancipation" holiday. Tension between some central and local officials has reportedly erupted over restrictions on foreign journalists' access to Tibet, with some Beijing officials arguing that restricted access to Tibet has harmed China's international image, while TAR leaders do not favor any loosening of the rules. Meanwhile, TAR officials continue to lay blame for any unrest among Tibetans at the feet of the Dalai Lama and his "agents." End Summary.

PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN FOCUSES ON THE "REAL" TIBET

[1](#)2. (U) With the approach of the 50th anniversary of the March 10, 1959 failed uprising by Tibetans against Chinese rule and subsequent flight of the Dalai Lama to India, the Communist Party is engaged in a propaganda offensive aimed at legitimizing its rule of Tibet. Elements of this propaganda campaign include:

-- Guidance by the CCP Propaganda Department to all Chinese media outlets to report positively on the March 28 Serf Emancipation Day Holiday (see paragraph 5).

-- Heavy coverage of Tibetan New Year (Losar in Tibetan) celebrations on February 25. While celebration of Tibetan New Year in 2008 received only modest media attention, this year state television and radio outlets devoted extensive live coverage to the festivities. In Beijing, China National Radio staged a live broadcast of celebrations by the capital's Tibetan community. (Note: China National Radio also announced March 1 that it would expand its Tibetan-language programming from four to 18 hours per day.) China Central Television's (CCTV) flagship evening newscast, Xinwen Lianbo, devoted nearly a third of its February 25 broadcast to scenes of Tibetans in Lhasa lighting fireworks and cooking traditional New Year dishes. Simultaneously, official media published editorials denouncing calls by exile Tibetans to boycott Losar celebrations.

-- A new exhibit on "Democratic Reforms in Tibet," which opened February 24 at Beijing's Cultural Palace of Nationalities. According to press reports, the exhibit, which will run through April, includes recently "declassified" documents related to the March 14, 2008 riots. One of these documents is an alleged "written confession" by Wangdui (Wandu), an ethnic Tibetan and former employee of an Australian public health NGO, who received a life sentence in October 2008 for "espionage."

-- A front-page editorial in the March 2 edition of the Party's flagship newspaper, People's Daily (ref

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A), that denounces Western, especially American, use of the Tibet issue to "contain China." Western politicians, the author says, believe that "to control Tibet is to control China."

NEW WHITE PAPER: "50 YEARS OF DEMOCRATIC REFORM"

13. (C) Also on March 2, China's State Council Information Office (SCIO) issued a white paper on "Fifty Years of Democratic Reform in Tibet" (ref B). Propaganda officials attempted to drum up interest in the paper among Beijing-based foreign correspondents. Wall Street Journal Beijing Correspondent Ian Johnson (protect), told PolOff on March 2 that he got a "frantic call" from Chinese SCIO officials early on March 2 summoning him to the SCIO office to receive "important news." Johnson said he was disappointed to learn that the "important news" turned out to be an advance copy of the White Paper that was released later that afternoon. Journalists for Reuters were similarly called in urgently by the SCIO to receive advance notice of the document.

14. (U) The White Paper rehashes well-worn propaganda themes regarding Tibet's "society of feudal serfdom" that was supposedly eliminated by the "democratic reform" that took place after the failed 1959 uprising. In summarizing the white paper, China's media has focused on passages alleging that the Dalai Lama and his family members owned 6,000 serfs, as well as the document's claim that China's "liberation" of Tibetan serfs "is entirely comparable to the emancipation of slaves in the American civil war."

FOCUS ON EMANCIPATION, NOT DALAI LAMA'S EXILE

15. (C) The current PRC propaganda campaign on Tibet has been in the planning stages since the fall of

2008, according to Zhou Qing'an (protect), a professor at Tsinghua University's Center for International Communication Studies. Zhou told PolOff March 3 that, soon after the close of the Beijing Paralympics in September 2008, the CCP Propaganda Department called a meeting of central and TAR officials to discuss strategies for dealing with the upcoming sensitive Tibetan anniversaries in March. TAR officials, according to Zhou, suggested the creation of the new "Serf Emancipation Day" holiday as a propaganda device to give the media "something to talk about" other than the first anniversary of the March 14, 2008 Lhasa riots and the 50th anniversary of the Dalai Lama's flight into exile. China's central leadership approved the plan in November 2008, Zhou said, and in January 2009 the TAR People's Congress formally "passed" the measure.

16. (C) In February of this year, the Propaganda Department issued guidance that China's media should "pay attention" to Tibet and report on the "Serf Emancipation Day," Zhou said. The Propaganda Department was urging all media to focus their Tibet coverage on the "positive" developments in Tibet over the last 50 years, especially economic development, and to shift the emphasis away from the Dalai Lama. China's official propaganda continues to attack the Dalai Lama, Zhou observed, but recently this criticism has been largely restricted to his role in Tibet's pre-1959 "serf society." As part of this "emphasize-the-positive" theme, China's media is now downplaying the Dalai Lama's alleged role as the "mastermind" behind last year's violence, Zhou said. (Comment: This shift in emphasis aside, high-level TAR officials attending the National People's Congress in Beijing continue to publicly blame the Dalai Lama for the violence of last year. TAR People's Congress Chairman Leggog (Lieque) told journalists March 8 that the Dalai Lama's supporters "have intensified secessionist activities" and are "trying to collude with their agents in Tibet.")

17. (C) Another contact separately confirmed that the Propaganda Department was indeed orchestrating "Serf Emancipation Day" coverage. Cai Wei (protect), an editor at Sanlian Life Weekly (Sanlian Shengzhou Zhoukan, a mass circulation lifestyle magazine),

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told PolOff March 6 that not only was the Propaganda Department directing "Serf Emancipation Day" coverage, but that in response to the Propaganda Department's guidance, Sanlian is working on a Tibet issue that will appear later in March, featuring interviews with former serfs. Although he frequently travels to the TAR and is currently working on a novel about Tibet, Cai Wei told PolOff that he did not volunteer to help with Sanlian's Tibet coverage because he does not want to take part in "directed" (fangzhen xing) reporting. Cai Wei lamented that even doing "positive" stories about Tibet is difficult because of the many restrictions and sensitivities surrounding the subject. That is why, Cai said, he decided to write a novel rather than a non-fiction book about Tibet, because publishing a non-fiction work would be "impossible."

JOURNALIST TAKEN TO MEET FORMER SERFS

18. (C) Part of the "Serf Emancipation Day" propaganda campaign included a February 10-13 foreign media tour of Tibet organized by the SCIO, the MFA and the TAR Government. Reuters correspondent Emma Graham-Harrison (protect) told

PolOff March 4 that organizers arranged for the journalists to meet with several former serfs. In addition, Chinese officials packed the schedule with visits to tourist sites and other activities of little or no news value, resisting her attempts to conduct interviews outside the set program. Chinese journalists shadowed the group and wrote glowing, though highly inaccurate, accounts of the tour. Xinhua News Agency even went so far as to publish a story on February 17 (which only appeared in Chinese and was ironically headlined, "The Power of Truth"), quoting Graham-Harrison as saying she "must" report more on social instability in Tibet in order to "satisfy the demands of (Reuters') clients.... But I am really more interested in Tibetan traditional culture, which the facts show has been very well preserved." Graham-Harrison complained to PolOff that this and other quotes attributed to her and a Reuters cameraman were "completely fabricated."

CENTER-LOCAL DISCORD OVER TIBET MEDIA POLICY?

19. (C) Many officials in the CCP Propaganda Department and the State Council Information Office realize that highly stage-managed media tours are ineffective in generating more positive coverage of Tibet, Zhou Qing'an told PolOff. Some officials in the central propaganda bureaucracy were arguing that China should relax restrictions on travel by foreign journalists to Tibet once the sensitive March anniversaries pass. TAR officials, however, remain highly resistant to any liberalization, Zhou said. Graham-Harrison told PolOff she saw hints of this center-local dynamic on the February tour. Originally TAR officials refused to allow the journalists to visit any of the major monasteries near Lhasa. After the journalists complained, TAR minders later added a visit to the Drepung Monastery to the itinerary, though Graham-Harrison said she believed SCIO officials had to lean hard on their TAR colleagues to make it happen. She also relayed that one of her SCIO minders, in an unguarded moment, admitted that People's Armed Police units in Lhasa had been confined to their barracks during the journalists' tour. Foreign journalists, the official acknowledged, are not fooled by such measures, which he indicated were the work of local TAR officials, not the SCIO.

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